

Redman's Old Field: Edgecombe County's First Courthouse

Walnut Creek / Tyancokey Swamp Colonial Patent Study

Tonto, 30 Jul 2026

A note on method: this project follows a Greek hierarchy of truth — mere opinion, opinion beyond reasonable doubt (OBRD), doxa (indubitable from primary sources), and nous (doxa confirmed across multiple independent instruments). Facts below are drawn from primary courthouse and deed records and are doxa unless marked otherwise. Ark citations point to FamilySearch's durable full-text image links.

A county without a courthouse

When Edgecombe County was carved out of old Halifax Precinct on 8 December 1754, the new county faced an ordinary but urgent problem: it had no place to hold court. The same order that split Edgecombe off from Halifax also had to say, in the same breath, where its government would actually sit. The answer the justices settled on was a patch of cleared ground on Tyancokey Swamp, already known locally by the name of a nearby landholder — “Redman’s Old Field.”

The founding order itself puts it plainly, directing that Edgecombe’s own court “in Course” was “to be held at Redmans Old Field on Tyancoka Creek,” while a newly split Halifax court would meet separately at Halifax town (FS ark 3:1:3Q9M-CSLK-KSHM-Z, img 39/577). From its very first day as a separate county, Edgecombe’s government sat on Tyancokey — inside the same neighborhood this project has spent two years mapping.

Eight years on Tyancokey

For the better part of a decade, “Redman’s Old Field” was not a historical curiosity but a working seat of government. The court didn’t merely convene there once; the name recurs in the county’s own records as an ordinary, expected place-name, the way a modern county might refer to “the courthouse” without further explanation.

A probate bond dated 28 September 1759 — five years after the founding order — still directs a defendant to appear “before the Justis of our Cort of Common pleas to be held for the County of Edgecomb at the Cort hows of Redmans old field on Tyan cora” (FS ark 3:1:33S7-L1SP-9DGS, img 1188/1874). The phrasing is casual, almost administrative boilerplate — exactly what you’d expect from a location so well-established that no one felt the need to explain it further. By 1759, “the Cort hows of Redmans old field” was simply how Edgecombe described its own seat of government.

A courthouse in decline

Government by 1762 was not going smoothly at Redman's Old Field. An undated internal complaint, probably from that year, survives describing conditions there in blunt terms: "Redmans old Field on Tyancour the Place appointed by act of Assembly for holding the Court for this County is very inconvenient," the writer complains — the jail could not be secured, and prisoners held there had escaped, the building "burnt down by Idle disorderly" persons (FS ark 3:1:3Q9M-CSLK-KS4X-5, img 176/577). Whatever Redman's Old Field had been in 1754 — a serviceable clearing, presumably central enough to the county's population to make sense as a meeting place — by the early 1760s it had become a genuine liability: an unsecured jail, at least one fire, and a county government that could no longer trust its own courthouse to hold prisoners or records safely.

The move to Tarborough

The complaint did not go unanswered. On 16 November 1762, the printed North Carolina Colonial Records preserve the moment the Assembly acted on it. Mr. Howell — presenting a petition on behalf of Edgecombe's own inhabitants — told the House that "the place called Redmans old field is a very improper place to hold thereat the Court of the said County," and asked for a law authorizing a proper courthouse to be built instead in the newly laid-out Town of Tarborough (FS ark 3:1:3Q9M-CSSR-X94K-8, img 497/721, printed page 908). The petition succeeded. Edgecombe's county seat left Tyancokey for Tarborough, where it has remained — in one form or another — ever since.

Four independent instruments, spanning the full eight-year life of the site — the 1754 founding order, the 1759 probate bond, the ~1762 jail complaint, and the 1762 Assembly petition that closed it out — agree on the same basic facts: a place called Redman's Old Field, on Tyancokey, served as Edgecombe County's first courthouse from its founding until the Assembly moved the seat to Tarborough in 1762.

Who was Redman?

The county's first courthouse borrowed its name from a private citizen, in the same way early American place-names often did — not from a founder or an official, but simply from whoever had cleared and worked the ground before the county needed it. That points to Bartholomew Redman, a name this project has tracked since it first turned up as a boundary call in Francis Griffith's own 1752 patent, whose metes run directly to "Redman's line."

Redman was a real, active figure in the Edgecombe community of the late 1740s and early 1750s — a subscribing witness to a deed in May Court 1749, and named as a debtor in the Robert Hilliard estate settlement in August Court 1751. His own patent line, independently confirmed against a 1755 deed (Newton to Dunn, FS ark 3:1:3QS7-898J-YGQW), sits on a stream called Curtis's — or Killebrew's — Mill Branch, placing him squarely in the same Tyancokey neighborhood the courthouse instruments describe.

He did not live to see the courthouse close. A sheriff's execution-sale deed, recorded in the Halifax deed books, shows that Bartholomew Redman was already dead by 17 August 1756 — barely two years after the county's founding order named his old field as its courthouse. His widow, Jane Redman (also recorded as Redmon), administered his estate; a judgment of £8.12s held against it by one Thomas Edwards led Sheriff Abraham Jones to levy on Redman's own land and sell it that November to Robert Williams for £7.5s (FS ark 3:1:3QS7-L9DD-6XZ6, "Halifax. Deeds 1741–1746," img 479/685). The deed gives the tract's own metes for the first time in this project's research: 150 acres on the south side of the Tar River — a different drainage entirely from Tyancokey, and explicitly not to be confused with the courthouse field itself.

That distinction matters, and it is the honest limit of what can currently be said. No grant or deed has surfaced showing Redman as an active party to any Tyancokey-side land — only his patent-line mention in Griffith's metes, and the courthouse citations' own unadorned use of his name. It remains genuinely open whether the "Redman" of the 1754–1762 courthouse records is the same Bartholomew Redman named in Griffith's patent, or a father, son, or brother of the same name. The timeline fits comfortably — a man documented alive and active from 1749 to 1751, dead by 1756, with a courthouse bearing his name operating from 1754 to 1762 — but no single instrument yet ties the full name directly to the field. As late as 1832, a deed still cites "Redman's lines" as an ordinary boundary marker, three-quarters of a century after his death — a name that outlived the man, in the way old field-names on a landscape often do, though whether that particular citation sits anywhere near Tyancokey is itself unconfirmed.

Why it matters to the map

Nothing in the four courthouse instruments ties Redman's Old Field to a natural feature specific enough to place it on the ground — no named creek fork, no measured corner, nothing beyond "on Tyancokey." A targeted search for "old Court House" as a later landmark recital, scoped to Edgecombe County, returned no results. For now, the site remains real, documented, and unlocated.

But it is worth remembering what it would mean if that ever changed. A county courthouse is not an ordinary corner call — it is the kind of place people keep returning to, on court days, for years, in ways that tend to leave more than one kind of trace: a road that still bends around where it used to be, a later deed's casual "near the old court house," a family's oral memory of where the county used to meet. None of that has surfaced yet. But if it ever does, Redman's Old Field would be an unusually strong anchor for the whole floating cluster of patents this project has been trying to lock down — Griffith's 676 acres, Newton's 264, Curtis's 300, and the Killebrew Mill Branch orbit around them — all of which already sit, by their own deeds, in this same stretch of Tyancokey.

It may also help explain something this project has puzzled over for a while: why this particular neighborhood shows such a dense cluster of land activity through the 1750s and into the early 1760s — patents, private sales, chain-of-title recitals, one deed after another citing the next. A working county courthouse, for the eight years it stood, would have drawn exactly that kind of traffic to its own

doorstep. That reading is offered as a plausible explanation, not a proven one — but it fits what the deed record already shows.

Full citations, quoted transcript text, and the ongoing open-questions list for this research thread are maintained in Griffith_Killebrew_MillBranch_Note.md (30 Jul 2026 entries) and Redman_Bartholomew_OldField_Note.md, both dual-written to WCv2 and NAS.